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The British Michigan AU

This AU, created by NewLostIslands and myself, is based around the War of 1812. During the War of 1812, Michigan was captured by the British but returned at the end of the war with the Treaty of Ghent. This AU explores what would happen if that was not the case, and instead, Michigan stayed in British hands as a British colony and eventual Canadian province.

Reading my oneshot, "The Time Spent In a Gilded Cage," might provide some context, but it is not required to understand the oneshots of this AU.

Official British Michigan AU Playlist

https://open.spotify.com/playlist/47QhpV9n8ixRqVj1S5jR9o?si=0dc18504a876428b

Anger At the Sight of You

America could feel nothing but anger. It burned through his body, hotter than the flames that had consumed his capital. It burned and consumed every part of him.

The anger was choking, and it was sorrowful. Under the haze of red that consumed his mind, it was hard to feel anything.

The anger was directed at many people and things, most of which America could do nothing about, not anymore. The war had ended, and America could no longer fight Britain or Canada, hurt them, and make them bleed and pay for what they did.

America couldn't get his son back. Michigan was gone.

It was hell.

And America was angry.

There was only one thing he could do to satisfy the anger, one thing he could do to get some sense of justice for his son.

And that was to execute William Hull for surrendering Michigan to their enemies without so much of a fight.

The others had been arguing about it for days since America gave the order. James thought it went too far, that they shouldn't—couldn't execute Hull for it. Rebecca, who rarely agreed with James on anything, thought the same: Hull didn't deserve the punishment he earned. She believed that Michigan was better off in the hands of Britain, and America *hated* her for it.

If America could have her executed as well, he would have.

The territories were more divided and didn't voice their opinions on it as much. They had become quieter since losing Michigan, especially Indiana and Illinois.

There were a few other voices offering opinions, voices America didn't have names for. He ignored them, and he ignored anyone who said that executing Hull was a bad idea.

Because Hull's death would bring justice, and for now, this was all America could do to get that.

America watched as the godforsaken man hung, hoping the retribution would do something to satisfy the anger clawing at his chest, allow him to feel something other than rage. But he just felt empty, like the anger had burned away every emotion he had, leaving him numb and hollow.

The target of all his anger was gone, and now he was empty. He stared blankly at the swinging body, a void in his chest.

"I told you it wasn't going to help. Killing William Hull was never going to bring him back." James muttered. America scowled.

"He deserved it." He muttered back quietly, trying to muster the same anger he had been feeling for months. But he couldn't summon much emotion in his voice, which was as hollow and empty as his chest. James scoffed and became quiet.

America swallowed thickly, a lump building in his throat. How could one feel so empty in a moment that was supposed to be so vindicating? How could he feel so numb? He should still be angry, still full of hate, of all those emotions that he would direct towards Britain in order to make him pay for what he had done.

How could he get justice when it was impossible to feel anything? America needed that anger. He needed it so he could get justice for Michigan.

"Michigan wouldn't want you to kill people for him," Illinois murmured. Shooting one last look at Hull, a confirmation that the man was really dead, America returned to his home.

"I'm not just killing him for Michigan, but for the safety of all my children. We've been over this. Hull was a threat to our safety because he had no sense of loyalty and was willing to sacrifice

children because he cares more about personal safety than his country and the people under his protection," America said, sitting down at his desk and taking off his glasses, rubbing at his eyes with two fingers.

"Hull...was far more complicated than that," Rebecca said, *"And we both know it."*

"What's done is done. We can't change it," America said, tears welling up behind his eyes. "We can't change anything. Now we have to move forward and hope..."

America cut himself off with a sob before breaking down into tears. Now that the anger was gone, and...and the numbness seemed to be fading, America was hit with an all-consuming choking sorrow.

"IT'S NOT FAIR!" America yelled, grabbing the inkwell of his desk and throwing it at the wall before slumping down to the ground, "It's not fair. He was innocent. He...he doesn't..."

America was cut off by another sob, louder and roughly, stealing away his break for a moment as the tears raced down his cheeks, coating his tongue with their salty taste.

"Britain's never dealt in fairness. Only power. If he can take something, he will, and since he can't get you back under his thumb..." James cut himself off, probably realizing that his words were not going down a helpful road.

"I know that James. I know...I just...I wish there were a way for it to have been me instead of him. A way for me to become Michigan, so I could make sure he stays with his family," America said, wiping at his face.

"Then we wouldn't have had you. Ideally, we'd all be here. In a perfect world, we would have gotten Michigan back," America heard Ohio's voice say.

"But in a better one, you'd still have your brother either way," America said.

"Just because Britain never saw you as anyone important doesn't mean

your children do," James said kindly, his voice painfully understanding.

"Cut this out, America. You're falling back into bad habits, and unless you want to be returned to our Father, you'll do better. Father needs a colony that can function properly, not one that wants to kill himself because he doesn't want to accept the order of things," Rebecca snapped, jarring America back into reality as he sucked in a breath through his teeth.

"That's enough!" James snapped, sending the two into a heated argument as America covered his ears, trying to block out their voices.

"There's no winning with that either. I don't want to lose either of you, Dad. Not Michigan. Not you." Ohio said, another voice to the cacophony of noise he was experiencing. America let out a little whimper, headache growing as he fought back the urge to retreat inside of their mind.

It was all too much.

"Can you all *please...please be quiet*," America whispered, eyes squeezed shut. The noise quieted, and America could feel Rebecca move back further into their head.

"I'm sorry, Dad," Ohio said, pulling America into a side hug, one that America leaned into, "But you've been...different since the war ended. No one can talk to you anymore. We all miss Michigan, and I know it's harder for you 'cause he's a part of you...but...you're still here, and it still feels like we lost you too."

America opened his eyes, staring up at Ohio's blurry face.

"I'm sorry. I just...I don't...everything feels wrong and messed up in here, and we're all...not coping well. We've been fighting a lot. It makes it hard to think." America said, unsure how to convey to Ohio how terrible things have been for them.

"We've all been having a rough time. But...we'd have less of a rough time if we all got through it together," Ohio said. America cracked a

small grin.

"When did you get so wise?" he asked. Ohio shrugged, and through his blurry vision, America thought he saw a faint trace of a grin.

"I picked up a few things here and there. Now, you wanna join the rest of us? Penny's making pannhaas for dinner, and I don't think I've seen you eat in a while," Ohio said. America sighed, looking down at his hands, hating how useless he felt. But he nodded and stood up, grabbing his glasses and putting them back on.

"Okay. I'll get something to eat, and then I'll check on everyone else. Thank you, Ohio," America said. Ohio gave a crooked grin before walking over to lean against America's side. America threw an arm over his son's shoulder, leaving his room.

America felt guilty about eating instead of spending every waking moment trying to get justice for Michigan, not trying to do something to ease his suffering.

But Ohio was right.

America had other kids that needed him.

And he refused to fail the rest of his children.

The Last Piece of The Stolen Son

America didn't want to do this. He didn't want to have to sit here with Britain and negotiate a new border that would leave his son on Britain's side of it, negotiate a new border that would abandon his son, the son that Britain wouldn't even let America say goodbye to.

America knew he was going to hate every minute of it. He already had a deep-seated dread burning in his gut that made his body hurt.

And he knew Britain was going to take every opportunity to mock him.

At least he would have James to help him. James would not let him suffer and would help America.

America wasn't going to be alone for this.

"And Britain will be," James said. It only made America feel a little bit better.

Because America had support. But Britain had shown that he still had all the power. America would never be able to take that power from him or fight him.

This war had taught America that he was still that scared little colony he had been when his War of Independence began.

America straightened his back and felt James shift to help him. Before stepping into the room where the negotiations would take place, a map was on the desk, and his father was standing there.

"Hello, America," Britain said, and America swallowed down his emotions.

"Hello, Britain," America said, careful to keep his voice even.

Britain was a predator. You couldn't show fear.

Showing fear gave him power.

America couldn't give him any more.

"Well, we have some important work to get to, don't we?" Britain said, gesturing toward the map.

"I want to know what you've done to my son first," America said, keeping his voice firm. He needed to gain information about his son before he would consent to any border changes.

"I don't recall having custody of any of your children," Britain said, his voice casual but something lurking in his eyes, as if he were waiting for a reaction.

"I should have known he would have tried something like this," James said, before nudging America out a little, taking control. America let him, knowing James would have an easier time speaking.

"Really? Then there must be no reason for this meeting, and Michigan should be back safe at home when I return there," James said, his voice drawing and unamused as he locked eyes with Britain.

"Oh, you mean Michigan? He's Lower Canada's son, last I checked," Britain said, and James had to force America down, prevent him from taking control as America practically leaped into action, angry.

How *dare* Britain give his son to that bastard? How dare Britain take Michigan from his family? How dare Britain try to pretend that he didn't destroy America's family?

America felt his anger returning, replacing the numbness, as a restless energy filled him.

The worst part was the fact that he could not act on it.

He was forever trapped in the horrible silence of diplomacy.

"Funny. I think there are many documents to prove otherwise. If you are unwilling to have us settle the border dispute, you could have said so before dragging us out here," James said, masterfully keeping his voice calm even though America could feel how angry he really was.

James was a blessing.

James began to stand up, moving to the door, ensuring that Britain understood their threat.

Michigan might be in Britain's hands, but he was still America's son, and America and James would deadlock any negotiations until that was agreed upon.

They had to.

Britain had taken his son, but America wouldn't let him take away his son's identity or America's memories.

"You're really going to hurt negotiations over this?" Britain said, in an attempt to get them to come back. A part of America felt guilt, but the anger kept it at bay.

"I'm not doing this," James said, not even looking back at Britain as he opened the door. "You are. I hope we can return to proper negotiations when you are done throwing this tantrum."

James had thrown back Britain's words at him, and America wasn't sure if he wanted to laugh or cry or scream.

America heard Britain stand up, but James walked out the door, and America let out a small laugh.

"James, that was amazing," America said. He knew it was not going to delay the negotiations for long...but it felt *good* to show that Britain didn't have complete control over him.

James didn't respond, but America felt their lips curl into a smile as the doors opened behind them.

"America!" Britain said as a hand was placed on their shoulder.

James turned around to face Britain.

"Can we come to an agreement about this? Or are you going to lie to me as we try to make peace?" James said, his voice sharp.

"Let's talk about your border with your *son*," Britain said, practically hissing out the word between his teeth. James nodded and walked back into the room, sitting down at the table and looking down at the map.

"I believe that the Michigan-Ohio border should be kept as it is," James began, a point America and his people had decided was a firm boundary they would not cross or give in at any point during the negotiations.

That border would remain.

No matter what.

"Why so?" Britain asked. James shot him a fixed look, and America realized that he was going to be in the backseat for this meeting, unwilling to leave but unwilling to take control.

"Because it's an already established border that has been labeled and therefore won't cause any more fights and will smooth out this entire process," James said, keeping his tone calm.

America was glad James was here. He knew that he would not be able to handle this without him.

America knew he would break down and start begging for his son back, even though he knew he was going to sign a treaty officially handing over custody soon.

America hated it.

He didn't know how empires could do this so many times.

Maybe they really were heartless.

"I suppose you're right. So we should keep all the current borders as is," Britain said, looking as if he was going to leave.

"No. Just that one," James said, before tapping the map, "You're going to have this peninsula, the lower one. The other peninsula will stay with us. All of it, not just the part that isn't a part of the former Michigan Territory."

Britain stepped back and gave James an even look.

"Oh, I need that cause Michigan would just love to have all his land. It really would be terrible for him to lose his land to his own father," Britain said.

America knew Britain was trying to manipulate him, and he hated that it was working.

He hated how well his father still knew him.

"The government has agreed that you get to have Michigan and his main lands, but only if we are given the Upper Peninsula. That land is not connected to the land you have conquered, and therefore, you have no right to it just because of pre-existing boundaries. We only agreed to have the Ohio-Michigan remain the same for convenience and to avoid dragging out this peace treaty and any more possible conflict," James said.

He sounded and acted more like a country than America ever could.

America just hoped Britain wouldn't push too much. Maybe he had trouble seeing all the harm his father had caused him, all the lies he had been told, but he knew that his son was going to be lied to about that.

And he hated it.

"My government thinks that since Michigan is my grandson and will be in my custody, all land that is his should transfer, like when Lower Canada came to live with us," Britain said.

"We are not the Kingdom of France," James said bluntly, and Britain seemed to fight to keep a scowl from his face. "You are getting more than we want. You are getting my son. If I had my way, Michigan would be back home with me. Instead, you are keeping what you stole, and we are giving you more land than you controlled," James

said, his voice still even and controlled, as America fought down tears and anger at the ever-present reminder of who he was giving away.

The son he was going to lose.

America began to sink away.

He hated the reminders, the pressure, Britain's presence.

He trusted James.

And he just couldn't watch this anymore.

It hurt.

Far too much.

Removing the Taint

TW for Blood

"Now, I hope you remember why this procedure is necessary," Britain said as he and the American waited in the dining room of Britain's human home as the surgeons prepared their tools for the surgery.

"Of course I do, Grandfather. Would you like me to repeat it?" the American said in a perfect response. Not too fast, the sign of someone lying or pretending to please him, but not too slow, a sign he forgot. How easily this one adapted, you could be forgiven for forgetting his unseemly origins.

"Yes, do so," Britain responded, eager to see if the American remembered everything correctly.

"My wings are being removed because they are a symbol of savagery and not fit for a loyal colony of the empire. They were forced onto me by America in an attempt to claim my land for his sinful nation and force you to recognize me as his child," the American repeated. Britain frowned before slapping the American on the back of the head.

"What was your mistake?" he lectured. The American's eyes widened, either surprised Britain caught his mistake or not realizing he had made one before he quickly bowed his head.

"The wings, not mine. They are not something I should claim because they are symbols of savagely and a countryhuman's attempt to kidnap me," he quickly responded. Britain smiled, grabbing the American's head and forcing him to return to his previous standing position.

"Good job," he said, "Any final questions?"

"Will...will this hurt?" the American asked nervously. Britain

scoffed. What a foolish boy.

"Of course not, not if you do everything you're supposed to," Britain said, tightly gripping the American's shoulder and shutting him up.

After a few moments of blissful silence, the surgeon said, "We're ready for the operation now. "

Britain sighed and walked away from the American to the corner of the room. The American shifted, nervous, and Britain frowned.

Well, that wouldn't do.

The American then froze, paralyzed under Britain's control. Interestingly, while colonies could never fight off his control, the American seemed to lean into it, accepting the control the same way a starving man would accept food. How interesting. Britain really had gone a long way in fixing up the American.

First, it was getting rid of that unproductive, independent personality, then any love for America, then assigning him a proper parent, and now, removing the last tangible piece of America from him. The American would never be rid of the taint of America that would permanently deform him, but at least he could be better.

Besides, it would be so nice to see America's face when he realized how much Britain had purified and cleansed the child's former territory. The sinful country would be horrified to learn how Britain had saved the child's soul from his sinful taint.

The American was in much better hands and could actually prosper in life now.

Britain ordered his newest colony to lay facedown on the table. His shirt had already been removed to reveal the hideous wings that America had cursed the poor boy with. Luckily, it would be a simple procedure to remove them.

"Begin now, and make it quick. I don't want to waste any more time on this than necessary," Britain ordered the surgeons, his voice echoing out of the American's mouth. Controlling the boy was going to get exhausting quickly, but he needed to keep his control to

minimize damage to his newest colony, his perfect tool to pull America back under his thumb.

Britain stood, fighting off exhaustion as the surgery commenced. By the time they got through one wing, the American was bleeding heavily, coating his body with his own precious lifeblood. Then, instead of moving onto the other wing, the surgeons began reaching for bandages.

"You can treat him when both wings are off," Britain ordered, causing the surgeon to jump.

"But—but he might bleed out!"

"That's fine. I can't say he doesn't deserve it, for how ungrateful he was when I got him. A death will be good for his health anyway, clearing up that pesky healing process. Now *continue*," Britain said, voice hard. The surgeon, understanding his place, nodded and proceeded with the surgery, the other wing coming off quicker than the first.

But, just as the surgeon predicted, the loss of both wings caused the rest of his colony's lifeblood to drain out of him, as Britain felt his control snap with his colony's death. Tutting his tongue, Britain walked towards his colony, shaking off the exhaustion that came with that form of control.

When he reached the colony, he began running a hand through his hair, somewhat matted with blood.

That was fine. Britain would get it cleaned up.

But, as requested, the wings were gone.

"Congratulations, Michigan. You're cured," Britain said, smiling softly at his grandson, "Get rid of those wings now, and then you are free to go. I have things handled from here."

"Of course, sir," the surgeon said before leaving, and, like clockwork, Lower Canada entered the room.

"It's done?" he asked.

"Yes, it is. Is the bath prepared? Death has healed his wounds, but I want to wash the blood before he wakes; that way, when he wakes up, it will be as if he was born anew, free of America's chains, and completely and totally one of us," Britain said. Lower Canada smiled and nodded.

"It is a great achievement, and my son has prepared the bath. Everything is ready," Lower Canada said, eyes consistently flickering back down to his son.

"You're both *mine,* remember? You can have your child back when I'm finished," Britain said. Lower Canada took a step back, bowing his head.

"Of course, Father. My apologies," he said. Britain nodded in approval before picking up Michigan, the boy's limp body growing colder under his touch. Britain walked over to the room where the bath was, barking a quick order at Virgin Islands to clean up any blood that dripped on the floor before setting his colony in the tub, watching the water turn red from the blood.

Britain then shoved Michigan's head under, deciding to take care of the blood in his hair first, just in case he came back during his wash. The blood, not yet dry, came out of his hair quickly, and Britain worked next on the area around the wings, pulling out all the remaining feathers, some of which caused more blood to leak out of Michigan's still body.

After about five minutes, Britain deemed Michigan clean enough, standing up and walking out of the room where Lower Canada, ever the loyal follower, waited.

"He's cleaned. Don't worry about saving the clothes, just change him into new ones. Put him in your room. Understood?" Britain asked. Lower Canada nodded.

"Yes, Father," he said before rushing into the room as Britain shook off his hands.

What a productive day. He couldn't wait until he got to show off his colony to America.

It would make all the struggle to tame him worth it.

The Estranged Son

When Michigan was kidnapped by Britain, Vermont and his family knew it was only a matter of time before he let the secret of the states slip. Either on accident or on purpose, Britain wouldn't let his little brother have a moment's peace until he got every scrap of information he could on the United States of America.

Vermont's papa, his siblings, and him.

A cloud of fear hung over their household due to that, a fear that permeated their lives and showed the pure power Britain had over them.

His influence would never go away. They could do nothing to stop him from taking and taking what he wanted.

Vermont was so afraid of him.

He could tell his papa was, too. He had never been right since losing Michigan. There were more people in his head now, too, something that Uncle James attributed to what had happened.

Everything was different. A cold fear had pierced their veil of safety, and Vermont wanted it to come back so badly.

But it didn't. Instead, things seemed to get worse.

It started with a letter from Lower Canada.

There was nothing to indicate Britain had written it or even that he had been involved. Knowing the tight grip the man kept on his colonies, that did very little to reassure Vermont. But...still, reading the contents of the letter, he couldn't help but think maybe it was real.

At least they knew for a fact that the British had found out about the states.

Because the letter was for *Vermont,* it asked how he was and told Vermont how Lower Canada missed him, how he mourned Vermont, and how he wanted to meet his son again. Vermont knew it had to be a ploy from Britain, but it was effective.

Vermont felt bad.

He told his papa about the letter.

Papa banned him from seeing Lower Canada, too afraid that it was a trap, too afraid of losing another kid. Vermont didn't blame him. He had seen the devastation wrought by Michigan's kidnapping. Losing another kid would destroy his papa.

But Vermont felt guilty, felt like he had to go at least once. They knew that Michigan was with Lower Canada based on what Britain had told his papa during their negotiations for their new border.

Vermont could see Michigan, see how he was doing, and see what Britain had done to him. That fact convinced his papa to let Vermont go, although not without many stipulations.

"Remember, you need to leave as soon as you see Britain. If at any point Lower Canada becomes threate—" Vermont cut off his papa with a small smile.

"I know, Papa. I'll be safe, I promise," Vermont said. Lower Canada seemed genuine, and Vermont didn't think his père would do anything to hurt him; Britain was another matter entirely.

"Sorry, I just—" His papa's voice was thick with tears and emotion. The anger from what happened to Michigan had turned into an all-consuming sorrow, and his papa was prone to tears and fits because of it. "I can't *lose* anyone else."

His papa's voice has cracked on those words. Vermont pulled him into a hug.

"I promise you, Papa, You won't lose me," Vermont said, patting the knife at his side. Papa nodded, looking panicked. Vermont gently led him to the couch in the parlor, where Massachusetts was. The older state immediately took their papa by the arm, pulling him

into a hug and whispering reassurances in their papa's ear.

Vermont watched as his papa slowly calmed before turning to Massachusetts.

"I'm going to leave now. Do you have him?" he asked. Massachusetts nodded, rubbing their papa's back. Taking a deep break, Vermont brought himself back to his state, where he would take his horse to Quebec City to meet his père.

And hopefully, his little brother.

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Vermont was nervous as he knocked on the door at the address provided by the letter. As optimistic as he was about this not being a trick, a part of him still worried the door would open to reveal Britain.

But when the door opened, it was just the semi-familiar face of his père.

"Vermont," Lower Canada said, relief and a small amount of joy in his voice as he pulled Vermont into a hug.

"Salut, Père," Vermont responded before pulling back from the hug." It is good to see you. But I have to ask: was Britain involved in this meeting at all? Because if he is, I cannot stay for long. I refuse to be around him."

"No, no. Father doesn't know. I was...I did not know if he would allow me to see you, and I...may not have told him everything my son told me," Lower Canada said. Despite the startling revelation that Lower Canada was rebelling against his master, the fact that he was feeding into Britain's delusion of Michigan being Lower Canada's son.

Vermont looked down, knowing that he would have to tell Lower Canada—Père the real reason he had been allowed to come...but he didn't want to ruin the joy yet.

"Ah, come in, come in. I've prepared a good meal for you. I wasn't

sure what you liked, so I just did something nice," Père said, putting a hand on Vermont's back and guiding him inside, "I hope you like it. My sons are supposed to join us, but they are both nervous about being around an American."

Vermont's heart sank. He hoped that Lower Canada was just oblivious to how Michigan really felt. He hoped that Michigan wasn't afraid of him.

When Vermont entered the dining room, he saw only one person, an unfamiliar colony that must have been Upper Canada. Michigan was nowhere to be found.

"Hello, Father. Vermont. Father, Michigan doesn't want to come. He thinks that Vermont is here to kidnap him and take him back to the Americans," Upper Canada said, his tone clipped.

"I'm not," Vermont blurted out, "I...I wouldn't hurt him. He knows that, right? I wouldn't hurt him."

Vermont's voice was pleading, begging for that not to be true, begging that his brother didn't actually fear him.
Vermont...Vermont didn't know what he would do if it were.

Upper Canada looked away, scowling. Père placed a gentle hand on Vermont's shoulder.

"I'm sure...I'm sure he does. Just give him time," Père said. Vermont just bit his lip. He had to tell them. He had...he...

Well, if Michigan wasn't here, then maybe he didn't have to. There was no use ruining things for everybody else.

So Vermont sat down with Upper Canada and his père and ate with them. It was somewhat silent, but Père tried his best to get Vermont and Upper Canada to talk. But Vermont felt awkward talking to Upper Canada, and he could tell that Upper Canada didn't know what to think of him either.

It was awkward.

But the slightly stilted conversation came to a halt upon someone

entering the room.

There he was—Vermont's little brother, with the faded flag of the monster that stole him from them. Then Vermont sucked in a sharp breath as he noticed something, his heart dropping.

"Michi? What happened to your wings?" Vermont asked, horror dripping from every word. His baby brother, his baby brother who was so big now, whose hair was the same dark shade as Georgia's, who so painfully took after their papa, no longer had the wings he was so proud of.

He should have them. He should.

Michigan took a step back, eyes flicking to Pè—to Lower Canada as he shrunk in on himself.

"Why?" Michigan asked, voice colder than Vermont had ever heard before. "Do you want me to have them? To make me look more like a Yankee?"

Vermont was vividly reminded of the one time he met Britain, how the empire had made him feel small, how the empire had spoke and spoke until up was down and down was up, and the only thing that made sense was him.

He didn't know what had happened exactly, but he knew that Britain had done something to his brother.

"No, no. I was just worried. They're still your limbs. That must have hurt," Vermont said, guilt flooding his body. Michigan was so afraid that he had ulterior motives. In a way, Vermont did. He...he had to tell them. He had no reason not to now.

"It's for the better," Lower Canada said, although there was something in his face that made Vermont think that he didn't quite believe it.

"The only reason P—United States let me come was because he wanted to know how you were, Michigan. He thought this was all some big trap to take me for the British Empire as well, but he let me come to ensure *you* were okay. He never stopped caring,"

Vermont said, looking away from them all and feeling guilty for not having been honest in the first place.

"So you're just a spy? You never cared?" Upper Canada said, his chair scraping against the floor. Vermont flinched, looking up at them and seeing Upper Canada and his little brother glaring at him as Lower Canada just gave him a devastated look.

"NO! I promise I wanted to come to talk to Père again, but United States would only let me go once I mentioned I could see Michigan and check on you for him. That was the only way I could convince him to let me come. I promise I am not a spy," Vermont said, desperation in his voice. Lower–Père pulled Vermont into a hug, and Vermont leaned into it, shutting his eyes.

"I should have known America would pull a trick like that. I'm so sorry you had to be put into that position," Père said. Vermont frowned and pulled his père closer.

Papa thought Père and Upper Canada were the enemy, the ones to blame.

Père, Upper Canada, and Michigan thought Papa was to blame.

But there was only one person who destroyed everything. And that was Britain.

Vermont had the opportunity now to coax his père and his brothers out of Britain's grasp.

He just had to be careful.

Something told him he was one mistake from being disowned.

"I...I don't want to have to choose between families. I love the American side, but I also love you. I...I want to come over still if you'll allow me," Vermont said, opening his eyes and pulling away. Père smiled.

"That sounds wonderful, Vermont."

The Toledo War

"Did not one examine the borders more before I was officially handed over?" Michigan asked his father, a worried distress in his voice.

"I'm sorry. It seemed like everyone had assumed that the border was fine and didn't have any flaws," Father said, his voice worried in its own way.

"Well, surely if we follow the words of the treaty, we get the Toledo Strip, right?" Upper Canada asked. Father nodded.

"That should be what happens, but I worry that America might try to press the issue, to get the land that rightfully belongs to us and claim it as his," Father said, anger darkening his expression. Upper Canada opened his mouth, as if he were going to say something, before shaking his head, turning to Michigan.

"Don't worry, Michi. Grandfather won't let America take any of your land. He'll fight for you," Upper Canada said, his tone reassuring, and Michigan nodded, happy to know that his family did support him in this.

Father pulled Michigan into a hug, and Michigan leaned into his grip, feeling safe in his father's arms.

His family would fight for him.

They had beaten America once and could beat him again.

Michigan just had to have faith.

But that didn't stop the worry over America taking him anyway.

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Grandfather radiated an aura of power and control, an aura that

was both comforting and terrifying.

But Michigan was a good grandson, a loyal grandson, and he had done nothing to earn any kind of anger that would make him terrifying.

Grandfather placed a hand on Michigan's head, smiling as he looked down at him.

"You have been so brave, handling this situation and the threat of an American invasion. I'm so proud of you," Grandfather said, the praise making Michigan's chest feel warm, proof that he was being good, that he was good, that he had overcome the circumstances of his birth and managed to make his grandfather proud.

It was the most amazing feeling.

"Thank you, Grandfather," Michigan said, a small, nervous smile appearing on his face, "I know we are the ones with the proper claim to the land according to the treaty, and therefore there is no reason to be fearful or back down, because that will just convince the Americans they can push us further."

Grandfather laughed.

"You are very right, my grandson. You have a wonderful understanding of the situation, which is good, as it will protect you from American manipulations," Grandfather said, before walking to the window. "You haven't spoken with any of the Americans, have you?"

He had spoken to one, to Vermont, to his...his maybe-brother, but Father had made it very clear that Grandfather could never find out about those meetings and conversations, lest Father lose the ability to talk to his son, to help him as he suffered under American hands.

Michigan hated lying to his grandfather, knowing it was unnatural, but he...he loved his father too much to hurt him that way.

"No, Grandfather. I am your colony. I trust you to handle that for me." Michigan said, knowing that he was not made to handle things like negotiations with other countries—especially negotiations with

countries that wanted him to be a part of them.

It was too dangerous.

He was better on the sidelines, waiting for Grandfather to handle things, like a good colony did.

"Good, good. Keep it that way. We don't need you to be corrupted again, not after all the work that went into helping you," Grandfather said, almost dismissively. Michigan ignored the tone, knowing his grandfather was just busy and worried.

"Of course, Grandfather. I know my place. Father and I think it is best that I stay with Upper Canada until the threat is over, just in case the Americans try to take advantage of the situation to harm or kidnap me, and to ensure that I am not a problem during your negotiations, if that is okay with you?" Michigan proposed, his voice soft and his tone calm, to prove to his grandfather that he was a good colony, that he obeyed and did whatever he could to make his country's life easier.

"That sounds like a wonderful idea," Grandfather said, turning back to Michigan, placing a hand on his shoulder, "I am so glad to see that you and your father have a good understanding of the risks associated with dealing with Americans. Vile things, aren't they?"

"Yes, Grandfather, they are," Michigan responded, falling into step with his grandfather as he walked down the hallway of his home.

"I have a meeting with America. Hopefully, he is willing to concede that his people were mistaken about where the border is and pass the town of Toledo to you, the rightful owner of it, and end this mess before it risks another war," Grandfather said.

"And if it doesn't?" Michigan asked, voice nervous.

"Then he is a fool who desires war," Grandfather said darkly as they stepped outside. Michigan stopped on the porch as Grandfather made his way to the carriage that was waiting for him to take him to inspect the border before his meeting with America.

Michigan felt a knot roll in his stomach.

He couldn't help but feel that none of this was going to go well.

Michigan had known America, had known Ohio.

They were stubborn.

And...Michigan knew they still wanted to take him back.

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Grandfather was angry.

That much had been clear when he returned from negotiations with America, anger flowing off his body, which was why Michigan had chosen to stay in his room, pretend he was doing his studies—anything to avoid having to be near his grandfather when he was angry.

Michigan knew he was in the middle of it and could not avoid his responsibilities forever, but one could try and hope.

Michigan froze when the door opened and Grandfather walked in, before forcing himself to relax, knowing he would only look guilty.

"America is refusing to recognize the real border, right?" Michigan asked as his grandfather sat next to him, ensuring that his voice was even.

"He insists that the initial border we thought it was should be kept, even if that is not what the law says. He also refuses to give up Toledo," Grandfather said, before sighing. "It is foolishly stubborn, but it seems as if we will be needing more negotiations to work this out. However, at the very least, he seems dedicated to not starting any more wars. He seemed almost nervous by the idea, so it seems that your father taught him a lesson that stuck."

With those words, Grandfather ruffled Michigan's hair, making the relaxation real as he leaned into his grandfather's side.

"I'm glad," Michigan said, "That makes it one less thing to worry about."

Grandfather began running his hand through Michigan's hair.

"One less thing to worry about indeed," Grandfather said, and Michigan could hear the smile in his voice. "Don't worry, this will be taken care of quickly, and America will no longer be a problem."

"Thank you," Michigan said, hoping that he was able to get all of his land back.

America had taken enough from him.

Ashes, Ashes, Dust to Dust

Michigan felt empty. He felt...so very alone.

He had tried to feel angry, to rage at America for taking his brother and best friend from him, but the anger had been replaced by grief.

Upper Canada was *gone*.

He was gone, and the world was just going to move on without him.

Michigan hated it.

He hated it so much.

He was still dressed in the suit from Upper Canada's funeral, a simple casket and funeral marking the death of another one of Grandfather's colonies, another one gone, now that the politicians didn't have a reason to keep him alive.

Michigan gripped the ends of his sleeves and wished so very badly that he could be human.

If he and Upper Canada and Father and Vermont and Grandfather had been human, then they wouldn't have had to deal with this all; they could have been happy and never had to deal with people being taken far, far too soon.

Michigan pressed his face into his hands and tried not to cry.

He couldn't cry.

"Michigan?" Michigan heard his father ask from behind him. Michigan straightened his back and began to compose himself.

He knew...he knew his father wouldn't be mad, he had fought Upper Canada's death for so, so long, but...

Michigan didn't want to look as helpless as he felt, as he *was*.

Michigan wanted to have something that he felt like he was in control of.

"Yes, Father?" Michigan asked, turning to his father, still unable to keep the sorrow and the hurt and the grief from his voice. Father's eyes were filled with worry, and he placed a gentle hand on Michigan's shoulder before sitting down beside him and pulling Michigan into a warm hug.

Michigan let his head fall on his father's shoulder.

"I'm so sorry," Father muttered, "I tried."

"It's not your fault. America did this," Michigan said, and even muffled under the grief, the anger came back. Father put a hand to the back of Michigan's head and rocked him back and forth.

"I still should have fought harder to prevent it from becoming a reality. America might have started it, but it was outside that finished it, and gave it to me," Father said, sounding guilty, and Michigan gripped his father tighter.

"I don't blame you," Michigan said, his voice firm. His father needed to know that it wasn't his fault. His father needed to know that he was innocent.

Michigan had lost his brother to America. He didn't want to lose his father to his grief.

"I know, I know," Father said, pulling out of the hug and giving Michigan a small smile. "Why don't you get changed out of that?"

Michigan looked down at the funeral clothes he was still in and nodded before heading back to his room.

The room that belonged to him alone.

Michigan walked over to Upper Canada's side of the room and picked up one of his shirts, pressing it to his face and crying softly into it.

He felt as if a part of him was missing.

What was he supposed to do now? What was he supposed to do without his brother and best friend?

Michigan slowly pulled himself together and began to get changed.

The ever-present pain in his back was nothing compared to the pain in his heart.

Michigan began to get changed, before looking back over at Upper Canada's clothes. He walked over and picked it up, hugging it and putting it on.

It made his brother feel a little closer, right next to Michigan's heart, where he would always and forever be.

Michigan fought down more tears before leaving his room, wanting to find his father again.

He didn't want to be alone, and something told him his father didn't either.

Michigan walked to his father's room and knocked on the door, not wanting to disturb his father. Father opened the door and smiled at Michigan.

"There's my handsome little boy," Father said, and Michigan tried to smile, but was unable to do so.

Michigan let out a shaky breath, tears still burning in the corners of his eyes.

"Everything hurts all over," Michigan said. Father stepped forward and pressed a kiss to his head before beckoning Michigan into his room, a familiar place of safety for Michigan.

It still didn't help the pain.

"That's grief," Father said, his voice heavy. "I felt that way when I thought Vermont died."

"Does it ever get any better?" Michigan asked, even though he knew his other brother had come back to life.

"The hurt doesn't fade, and you still miss them as much...but you learn to think more about the good than the bad. We'll make sure he's remembered and honored." Father said, putting his head on top of Michigan's own.

Michigan broke into a small smile.

"Yeah," he said, his heart still heavy with grief and anger, but with it ebbing some. "We will."

Michigan would never stop missing his brother. He would never stop feeling a hole in his heart where his brother had been.

But Upper Canada would be remembered.

Michigan would never let such a bright light be forgotten.

The Misguided Aunt

Michigan had heard about the new colony, about Sandwich Islands, the country that his Grandfather had taken under his wing. He had heard about her...relationships with America, how she thought that America was good, that he was family.

That he can be trusted.

Michigan was eager to avoid her for that reason. He didn't know what nonsense America had told her about him, but Michigan was pretty sure that Sandwich Islands would try to recorrupt him with America's delusions.

Unfortunately, he was not so lucky.

"Michigan," Grandfather asked a few hours after Sandwich Islands had arrived, "I want you to help me."

"Yes?" Michigan asked, eager to do anything he could to help his grandfather.

"I need you to help me show Sandy that America is using her and that she shouldn't trust him and should begin to distance herself from him," Grandfather asked, placing a gentle hand on Michigan's head.

"Are you sure I'm the best—" Michigan began before Grandfather's hand suddenly tightened around his hair, pulling it sharply.

"You are the only colony of America that has been decorrupted. What better person than you to show her the delusions and backwardness of America?" Grandfather said. Michigan nodded.

"I understand. I apologize for questioning you," he said. Grandfather smiled, and Michigan felt Grandfather's grip on his hair loosen.

"Good boy. Now, I think it's best you start now, before she takes to

lashing out. Ireland has sworn to be troublesome, so the sooner you help her, the less likely she is to be corrupted by his madness," Grandfather said before pushing Michigan forward some. Michigan stumbled before recatching his balance and rushing off to find Sandwich Islands.

She was easy to find despite having the same flag as so much of his family due to the air of confusion and unfamiliarity around her.

"Are you Aunt Sandy?" Michigan asked, just to verify her identity. The colony startled before nodding.

"I am," she said, "Who are you?"

"My name is Michigan," Michigan began, watching her for any trace of recognition. Much to his disgust, she seemed to recognize his name, a sign that America was probably feeding her lies about him.

"Oh! Lika's so—"

"I'm not that bastard's son! I am Canada's son and Britain's grandson, and I've always been British because I refer to acknowledge anything between myself and that...that monster," Michigan snapped, anger flooding through him. He hated this. He hated to be associated with America. He couldn't wait until the day America dropped this delusion and Michigan could finally live in peace.

Sandwich Islands' eyes widened as she took a small step back, seemingly caught off guard by his anger.

"I'm sorry," she said, her tone nervous. "I had been told you were Amelika's son."

"I'm not. That...America took me away from my family; he hurt me and tainted me. I was lucky enough to be saved, but...other territories have to suffer under him. I...I hate him," Michigan said, trying to ignore the pain that came with those memories, the months of learning who he really was and where he belonged.

"That...that doesn't sound like Lika. Any time he brought you up...you could hear how much he misses you," Sandwich Islands

said. Michigan scowled.

"It was probably all just a trick to fool you. He's probably trying to steal you from Grandfather because he's upset that I wanted to be with my *real* family. You're just being used by him to hurt Grandfather," Michigan reasoned. It made perfect sense. Why else would America care about any of his half-siblings if not to corrupt them and turn them against Grandfather?

"I am not! Lika loves me, and he cares about me as a person. He's not using me to try and get back at Beretania," Sandwich Islands said, crossing her arms with a small huff. Michigan suppressed the urge to roll his eyes. How could she be so stupid to believe America about anything?

There must be something about the savage mind that would explain it, as Michigan could see no other reason that someone could believe something so delusional. Well, he could think of one other reason, but Sandwich Islands was a favorite of his Grandfather, and Michigan was not going to risk the punishment that would probably follow, pointing out how she was mad.

He knew Grandfather would just see it as Michigan looking for an excuse for his failure. Even if she were mad, Michigan would still be expected to convince her of the truth.

"How can you know that? How can you dismiss the pain I suffered just so you can feel like you're in the right? How can you do any of that and claim you aren't being manipulated?" Michigan asked, his voice a mix of anger and confusion, slowly getting louder.

He needed to show her she was wrong, and that meant pointing out the flaws in her argument until she had nothing left to argue with. Then, she would have to agree with him and realize that he was right.

"I don't know what kind of pain you are claiming to feel, but it's obvious that Lika loved and adored you," Sandwich Islands said, sounding annoyed, like she was the one arguing with someone who was defending a nonsense claim.

"He only cared about using me to make himself look better! I never meant anything to him! Don't act like you know my personal relationships! He killed my brother!" Michigan snapped before turning away. He knew he had a job to do, but he needed to calm down before he let his anger get out of hand.

At least he gave Sandwich Islands something to think about. Hopefully, with time, she would realize her mistakes. If Grandfather hadn't promised to give her independence, then he would have had the time necessary to teach her the error of that way of thinking, as he did with Michigan.

She would be better off with them forever anyway, safe, away from America, and safe from anything else that would harm her.

America was hurting her, and Grandfather wanted to help her.

Why couldn't she see that?

The Kind of Worry That Kills You Slowly

America knew he needed to give Hawaii time to adjust after she was freed from Britain's control. He knew what Britain did to your mind. He knew what learning about freedom meant, even if it was freedom again.

America gave her all the space he could manage, until it was too much, and he returned to Hawaii's land, in control of his body, but only just.

He needed to see how his son was doing.

He needed to know, because Britain and Canada tried their best to keep any information about Michigan's health and well-being from America.

It was torture.

They claimed to be protecting Michigan, but it was just another way for them to torment America, to use Michigan as a tool in their revenge.

"It's despicable," James spat, hatred in his voice. He had become much angrier since Michigan had been taken.

America couldn't blame him.

He had as well.

America knocked on the door, and it opened, and Hawaii's eyes widened.

"Lika? What are you doing here?" Hawaii asked. America opened his mouth and tried to keep his voice calm.

"I need to talk to you about my son," America began. "I didn't want to hound you, but I have been given so little information about Michigan, and I wanted to know if you had learned anything, see if he was okay."

Hawaii's face crumbled a little, and America's heart *shattered.*

"Shhh, relax. We don't know anything. Maybe it's just painful for her to think about. You're okay," Amelia said, her voice gentle and soothing. America let out a slow breath, trying to calm himself.

"Is he hurt? Okay?" America asked, trying not to scare Hawaii, but desperate anyway.

He already knew about Michigan's wings. America wasn't able to be in control for a week after that.

It hurt too much. It all hurt too much.

"He's okay...I...I don't know how to begin to explain," Hawaii said. America gave a shaky smile.

"You don't have to explain. You can just tell me anything you can about him and who he is now. I love him, miss him, and I need to know that...that he's okay," America said. He couldn't say if Michigan was being hurt, because America knew his father.

Hawaii nodded.

"He...he hates you, Lika," Hawaii said quietly, and America was only dimly aware of his knees giving out and Hawaii catching him, as he stared ahead in numb shock.

He could hear the others raging as Amelia tried to calm them, ever the peacekeeper, but America could barely hear it, all voices sounding as if they were underwater.

It was his worst fear.

His son hates him and forgot all America did for him, believing the people who would beat him without a second thought.

"Lika?" America heard, and he did his best to swallow down the emotions, feeling Charlotte whisper soothing words, calming the raging anger and sorrow in his heart, as Amelia took control.

"Sorry," Amelia said, her voice soft and broken, "We had thought that...we knew that Britain was going to do something. Ignorance just allowed us not to think our worst fears were true until now. Thank you. I'd rather know."

Amelia's voice cracked as she said those last words, as Hawaii helped them sit down on her couch. Hawaii pulled them into a hug.

"I'm so sorry, Lika," Hawaii said, clearly distraught by how America had reacted to the news.

America had never shown weakness like that to her before.

"It's not your fault," America said, taking back a little bit of control from Amelia. He needed to tell her this himself. "What could you have done? My father likes power, he likes control, and Michigan...he was my beloved child, and...maybe Britain loves him, but that doesn't mean that Michigan can't be used to hurt me too."

"That's horrific," Hawaii said, and America felt a little bit of sorrow knowing that he had just destroyed any relationship Hawaii could ever have with Britain.

"Good," James spat.

"She needs Britain's help to survive as a country if she wants to stay independent from the annexation forces of Germany, Spain, Britain, and France. This might not be good for her," Charlotte said, as if she was trying to soothe James' anger before it burst out.

"Yeah," America said after a moment's pause, "It is."

"Michigan also said that you were manipulating me to hurt Britain," Hawaii confessed quietly, as if she were afraid to say those words. America swallowed down more pain.

"I..." America said, before his throat closed up, and he struggled to come up with words to say.

"Char, America, let me talk. I promise I won't be angry," James said. America could feel Charlotte's reluctance, but they both backed away and let James take control.

"Britain has a talent for words," James began, his voice heavy with the remains of his anger, but mostly with his sorrow. "When I was younger, I knew...deep down, that the hurt was wrong. I think...I think I hated him for it, but I wasn't ready to admit it. I would try my best to protect my little siblings from it. I would take the blame if I could."

It was those words that made America realize that James wasn't talking on behalf of America.

He was talking about himself.

"Lika—" Hawaii began, but James continued, as if now that he started, he couldn't stop.

"I tried to love him, but every time he hurt me, it made it harder. And...he could twist things, with pretty words and a gentle voice, he could make himself the hero, and everyone else who ever loved me the villain. He could assign his behaviors to others, and demonize them until you didn't trust them, until the only one who you trusted was him."

"James..." America muttered, wishing he could pull his brother into a hug. James then began to back away, letting America take control again.

"She's safe...and she deserves to know. Know how much you care and how little Michigan knows now," James said, and America felt his heart stop.

"Lika," Hawaii began, not knowing the inner conflict that was raging inside of America. "I'm so sorry."

"It's okay," America said with a small smile, "But...I haven't been entirely honest with you. I'm sorry, but I was scared, scared that Britain was going to hurt them the way that he hurt Michigan."

"Hurt who?" Hawaii asked. America turned to face her, not making

eye contact. She didn't like that, but they were just above her head, so they were facing each other.

"Hawaii, I love you, and you are my sister, but you are not my only family. My states, my other territories, they're alive, my kids. I want you to meet them," America said. Hawaii's jaw dropped, but America couldn't help but think that the future was going to be a little bit better.

He couldn't do more for Michigan.

But he would help the family he could.

His children AND his sister.

A United Family

Michigan leaned his head against his father's shoulder, excited for what was to come. He, Father, Aunt Nova Scotia, and his cousin, New Brunswick, were about to be unified into one dominion under Grandfather.

Michigan hadn't been sure if it was even going to happen, as New Brunswick and Aunt Nova Scotia hadn't been as favorable for it, but the Fenian Raids from the Americans down south, and their attempts to establish a new country, to steal more family from Michigan, had convinced them that this was needed for their safety and protection.

Grandfather had been preparing a house for them, nearby to his, but allowing them to live on their own, a new right given to them with the creation of their dominion.

Father was going to become the country, because he could be trusted and already bore the name the country would have.

And father's current land was going to be split into two new provinces.

Michigan's little twin siblings.

He was excited for them to be born. Michigan was excited to be a big brother to them, excited to be to them what Upper Canada had been to him.

Michigan was going to make sure they never felt unsafe or unhappy, that they would know only peace.

Michigan had lived a good life, but there was a lot of pain to get there.

He didn't want Quebec and Ontario to feel that pain.

Michigan knew the British North America Act, 1867, had been signed back in March, but it was finally coming into effect today.

Michigan was getting his siblings, and Father was getting his country.

Father had been preparing the house for Aunt Nova Scotia and her son. While the upper floors were still under construction, Father was preparing for a dinner with New Brunswick, Aunt Nova Scotia, and the new provinces, and the new dinner routine with the six of them.

More of Michigan's family might join, as there were plenty of colonies left on the American continent to join their new country, but he had his safety, his father, and his new siblings, and he was content with that.

Now he just had to wait for those new siblings to be born, a time no one was sure of, with the vagueness of "July 1st is when it will come into effect."

Michigan hoped it would happen soon.

He didn't think he could wait any longer.

This confederation really was the best thing to ever happen to him.

"Michigan, can you check on the dishes in the kitchen?" Father asked, seemingly noticing Michigan's nervous energy. Michigan nodded and pulled away from his father and walked into the kitchen.

Michigan slowly and methodically began to check the dishes, taking out the ones that were done and marking down how long the others were going to take.

It was...it was soothing, and Michigan was glad his Father knew him well enough to help him.

When Michigan was finished, he sat in the kitchen for a few moments, feeling as if the day was taking forever as he waited.

Michigan hated waiting.

Then there was a scream and a thud, and Michigan rushed over to the room his Father had been in—where the noises had come from.

When Michigan entered the room, his jaw dropped.

It was his little brothers, sitting on the ground in front of their father, teary eyed and smiling.

Michigan walked to stand by his father, looking down at his little brothers, trying to see if any of them looked like Upper Canada, trying to see if he could figure out which one represented the lands that once belonged to his brother.

Because Michigan knew neither of them were going to look like him.

No matter how much he hated that.

But they were still his family and his brothers.

"Hello," Michigan said, smiling down at his brothers. Their seals were very similar, but Michigan thought he knew which was Quebec, with the Fleur-de-Lis, a strange symbol for a British nation, but then again, his father had been different.

Just like Michigan.

The biological children of Grandfather's enemies.

Quebec looked between Father and Michigan, and Father smiled at his son.

"This is your older brother, Michigan," Father said, "Michigan, these are your little brothers, Ontario and Quebec."

Michigan swallowed down happy tears, unable to keep the beaming smile from his face.

"Hello, Bonjour, it is so wonderful to meet you both," Michigan said. Ontario took a step forward, glancing at Father, who leaned down

with a smile and placed a hand on Ontario's shoulder.

"You can say hello," Father said, his voice soothing and perfect, full of everything Michigan loved about him.

Everything Michigan knew his brothers would love about him.

Ontario took some steps forward, and Michigan got onto his knees to better face his brother, wincing at the pain in his back, before forcing a smile for his brother, knowing Ontario needed to feel loved and accepted.

"Hello, Ontario. It's very nice to meet you," Michigan said, holding out his arms for a hug. Ontario returned it and Michigan pulled him closer, relishing in the warmth of his little brother.

"Quebec?" Father then asked, **"Would you like to hug your brothers?"**

Quebec looked uncertain, looking back and forth between Father and Michigan and Ontario, clearly uncertain around someone who wasn't speaking much of his preferred language.

"Join us, Quebec. I want to meet you too," Michigan said, his French a little bit rusty and shaky, but clearly a bridge to Quebec. Quebec's eyes lit up a little, and he joined the hug.

Michigan pulled his little brothers close, relishing in the warmth and comfort of the expansion to his family, before letting go and pulling away, trying to stand up before his back twinged in pain, and Michigan froze, before Father helped him to sit in a chair, a sad smile on his face.

"I'm okay, Father. It was worth it," Michigan said.

He cared more about his brothers than the pain.

He couldn't wait for Grandfather to meet them.

The Scars Left By Angry Men

Michigan had tiny wing stumps. Ontario had seen them before, the few times Michigan wore the shirts that allowed them to show. It scared Ontario. His big brother seemed so strong and infallible. How could someone have cut off his wings?

Ontario knew the tiny stumps hurt Michigan sometimes because he had seen his brother's face tight with pain as their father massaged aches out of Michigan's muscles, trying to do something to relieve the pain.

Ontario tried not to ask about it, but as time went on, he grew more and more curious until, finally, he couldn't take not knowing anymore.

Michigan was lying face down on the couch, wearing one of the specially tailored shirts that allowed the small stumps on his back to show.

"Michi?" Ontario asked. His brother lifted his head from the couch, dark hair falling into his eyes.

"Hmm? Yes, 'Tario? What do you need?" Michigan sounded tired, and Ontario almost backed out of it because of that, not wanting to bother Michigan.

"I'm sorry if I'm bothering you," Ontario said. Michigan smiled, sitting up and stretching his arms.

"It's alright. What do you need?" Michigan asked again. Ontario scuffed his foot against the floor, looking away, nervous.

"I was wondering...I was wondering about your back. Those things...those are wings, right? Or were wings, once?" Ontario asked, looking back up at his brother. Michigan stilled, pain flashing through his eyes.

"They were once, yes," Michigan said, something...his voice sounded hurt or ashamed. Michigan looked ashamed. Why would he be ashamed? It wasn't his fault his wings were gone, right?

"What happened?" Ontario pried hesitantly. Michigan looked away but sighed.

"It's the remains of something a very bad man did to me," Michigan said, gaze growing distant. Ontario felt rage burn through him. How dare someone do this to his brother? How dare someone hurt him like that?

"I'm sorry. It must hurt a lot," Ontario said. Michigan sighed.

"It does hurt sometimes...I don't know why...but it's okay. Father helps me with the pain, and Grandfather was a big help in curing me from what *that man* did to me. You don't need to worry, Ontario. I'm okay now." Michigan said, a soft smile on his face as he pulled Ontario into a hug.

Ontario leaned into the hug, happy that his brother had healed from whatever had happened to him.

Yet, he still felt a burning anger at the person who did that to Michigan. He wanted to find them and beat them up for hurting his brother so permanently. He was so mad. He hated the idea that someone could even think to harm another person like that, a person like his brother.

How could someone live with themselves if they held someone down and cut off their limbs? How could that person live with themselves?

It wasn't fair! Michigan deserved to have his wings back. He deserved to live without the pain Ontario had seen haunt him. He deserved better.

It wasn't fair.

Frustrated tears escaped as he buried his face into Michigan's side.

"Are you okay?" Michigan asked, his tone kind and gentle, proving that he didn't deserve that.

"I wish you didn't have to go through that pain. I wish I could have stopped it," Ontario said, voice muffled by Michigan's shirt. Michigan's hand ran through his hair before trailing down to the small of his back.

"It's okay. It's not your job to stop it. Grandfather and Father took care of things. I've healed. I'm okay. You don't need to worry," Michigan said. Ontario pulled away, looking his brother in the eyes.

"Do you promise?" he asked. Michigan nodded.

"I promise."

Ontario looked over Michigan's shoulder, wondering what his brother would have been like if he had wings. Would he have been able to fly? Would he have flow Ontario and Quebec around? Would he look happier without any dark sadness clouding his eyes when he thought Ontario wasn't looking?

"Can I touch them?" Ontario asked. Michigan startled, giving Ontario a shocked look.

"What?" he asked, his voice full of confusion.

"The wings. Can I touch them?" Ontario asked. Michigan looked so baffled at Ontario's request, eyes alight with confusion.

"Uh...sure?" Michigan said moving positions, so his back was to Ontario. "Just be gentle. I'm more sensitive there."

Ontario nodded, reaching out a cautious hand on the rightmost stump, the longer one. It still had feathers on it, although they were in a horrible state themselves, like when you find a feather on the ground that's been chewed up by an animal.

It was weird. When Ontario touched it, the wing stumps twitched slightly, and he pulled his hand back.

"Sorry!" He exclaimed. Michigan let out a small laugh.

"It's okay. It didn't hurt. I would have told you if it did." Michigan said. Reassured by that, Ontario reached out again, laying a gentle hand on the wing stump. It was less than a foot long, and he could feel where the rest of the wing once was, a jagged scar hidden under broken feathers.

He traced the scar with this finger, feeling anger well up again. It wasn't fair that Michigan had to deal with this kind of injury. Ontario then went to place his hand on the spot between Michigan's wing stumps but was cut off by Michigan's sharp voice.

"Stop!" he exclaimed, causing Ontario to jump slightly, "Sorry, it hurts there."

"I'm sorry. I don't want to hurt you," Ontario said as Michigan turned back to face him.

"I know you don't. You're too kind to want to hurt people," Michigan said, ruffling Ontario's hair, causing the younger province to squawk in indignation, pushing Michigan's hand off his hair, sticking out his tongue at his older brother.

"No, I'm not. Imma beat up the person that hurt you." Ontario said. Michigan laughed, a fond look in his eyes.

"Father took care of that already. He ensured that the person who hurt me will never touch our family again." Michigan said, "I'm safe, so you don't have to beat anyone up."

"Well, anyone else that tries to hurt you, I'll beat them up," Ontario said, crossing his arms. Michigan laughed.

"Sure, Ontario. If anyone else tries to hurt me, I'll tell you so you can do that," Michigan said. Ontario grinned at that.

His brother had always done so much for him. Ontario was glad that he would have the chance to return the favor and make sure no one hurt his brother like that again.

Letters to a Dead Man

The Upper Peninsula is a state called Sylvania in this AU

August 12, 1868

Dear Michigan,

I must confess I don't know precisely why I am writing this letter. I suppose I am just curious about my Canadian neighbors, and I want to be on good terms with you. While I know that we are on good terms politically, I am curious about the men behind the governments. I am sending a similar letter to Ontario, asking if either of you is interested in meeting in person and fostering an era of peace in our region now that tensions between our borders seem to be dying down.

Sincerely,

The Superior State of Sylvania

✎□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

September 7, 1868

Sylvania,

While I am intrigued by your offer, I will admit I am not willing to visit your land with my newborn brother due to our nation's history. While I do not want to slight you by implying your offer is deceitful, but I have little reason to trust an American state. Vermont insists you are being truthful, so I am willing to extend an offer for you to come to my capital city of Detroit and meet my younger brother and I.

I cannot say that it will start a friendship, but perhaps it can satisfy your curiosity and put suspicion to rest. If you are willing to accept those terms, then I will prepare accommodations for you and arrange the date.

Sincerely,

Michigan

✎□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

September 28, 1868

Michigan,

I heard that you responded to Sylvania's letter and spent days agonizing over whether or not I should reach out to you. While you talked to Vermont and have responded, she has kept the details of your correspondence a secret, so I am unsure whether my letter will be appreciated. But I have much to say, and I am no longer willing to hold my tongue, not now, in the aftermath of our great Civil War.

Sometimes, I wonder if you remember any of our childhood, of the jokes, the joy, and the laughter. Some nights, I am haunted by those happy memories and the thoughts of what you are going through. Vermont says you are happy, and I try to believe that, but there is little it can do to soothe the unhappy thoughts that haunt my sleep.

I am so very sorry I wasn't there for you. I was the closest member of our family at the time, and I often regret not traveling to Detroit to protect your land, as you were not able to. I regret not being there to convince Hull not to surrender. If I had only been less foolish, I could have saved you from your fate.

I will never forgive myself for that. I hope you forgive me.

It is hard to put into words the many, many things I have to say to you. I want to know you are safe, that you are okay.

I miss you so much, little brother.

I hope that this letter is not an intrusion and that it doesn't get you in trouble with Britain. I know you and the Canadians are supposed to be somewhat independent now, but knowing Britain, I wonder how much control that really leaves you with.

If you are willing and able, I would like to meet you in person, to talk to you again. It has been many years. I miss you so.

Your faithful older brother,

Ohio

✎□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

October 3, 1868

Michigan,

I couldn't believe it when I heard from Ohio that you were starting to talk to others in our family aside from Vermont. I was so happy that I nearly cried with joy. I have missed you so, so much, and I can't wait to start talking to you again.

It was terrifying losing you. I thought at first that you were just quieter than usual or that you had gone to sleep for a long time like Newport, Portsmouth, and Warwick sometimes do. Getting that letter and realizing that you were gone, that you had been taken by the man who had hurt our father so much, that hurt our family, I was so scared.

Learning that you weren't ever going to come home was scarier. I was so scared for you. You were my big brother, and you always seemed so strong, like nothing could hurt you.

And then Britain took you. And he hurt you. (I presume. Every British colony I have met has stories of how he hurt them, and considering how much he hates our father, I can't imagine he was willing to be nice to you.)

I didn't want to believe that you were going to be gone forever. I was convinced it was a trick, a lie, anything but the truth.

But he stole you.

Mitchigan, I miss you so much. I have never been closer to a brother than you, and every day, the ache from your being gone, being trapped, beats in my chest like another heartbeat. It is a

gaping wound in my soul, one that has never healed. Sometimes, I will sit on the shores of the lake that shares your name and stare out across the water.

I cannot see your land, but I pretend I can. It helps.

I have bought your birthday gifts every year you and I have been apart. Since I got my body, that is. I sometimes wonder why. I have never gotten the chance to give them to you, and you and I have not spoken since we were both young and innocent.

I want to see you again if you are willing. I have a lot of gifts for you.

With all the love I have in my heart, your little brother,

Illinois

✎□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

November 1, 1868

Sylvania,

Please tell your siblings to quit sending me letters. Vermont is my brother, and you are my neighbor, but I refuse to engage with any of the states involved in America's delusion that I was once American and am, therefore, his child. I won't have my family be dishonored by this.

I don't care who they think I am, but I will not be manipulated into thinking I am related to them. I will not give up my family to feed into the delusions of a country that I am not and have never been a part of. I will not betray my father or, my *proper* siblings, or my grandfather for them.

Please ensure they know that, as I do not want to be hounded by their letters and delusions.

Sincerely,

Michigan

Tearful Reunions

America paced worriedly outside the meeting place, anxiety flooding his body and choking his mind, making it hard to think. His emotions were a tangled mess, and America couldn't figure out if he wanted to scream or cry.

"Preferably, you won't scream when you see him," Amelia said in a soothing voice, *"We don't want to scare him off, and who knows what those bastards have been filling his head with. We've already—"*

Amelia cut herself off, not wanting to mention what Britain had done to their son. It was hard for all of them to think about it, let alone say those dreaded words. America paused, nodding, not wanting to say anything. While he had recently revealed his DID, he was trying not to disturb anyone by talking to the others in public.

Besides, this was one of the most important days of his life. He couldn't mess it up. Not now, not after everything. Not when he was so close. America had stopped pacing now and was instead wringing his hands together, doing everything he could to dispel the anxious energy that filled his body.

Then, his son arrived. Before he said anything, America just drank in the appearance of his son. Photos and videos online of various events he had attended were one thing, but America hadn't seen him in person...America had never seen him in person before. Not outside of his inner world, at least. Tears sprung into the corners of his eyes, and a heavy lump settled in his throat.

His son's flag was so reminiscent of a British colony, with the Union Jack canton that Britain used to claim them as his own. The brand was still visible on his son's face.

"A flag is not a brand. I know you're angry at Britain, but you can't stand acting angry at Michigan. It's not his fault," James said.

"No. It's ours," Rebecca murmured as the family pang of self-loathing and regret hit America.

The rest of Michigan's flag was read, with a seal in the corner. A sun over what must be one of the Great Lakes and part of the lakebed, with a dear at the top. The deer's legs were tied together. America wondered if he was being mocked if Britain created that seal as one final insult, one final blow to him. A reminder that he failed and his son was now forever stuck with his captors.

Michigan had grown into a handsome man with dark hair, brown eyes, and the deer's ears and antlers.

America still wanted to cry.

"Uh...Hello, America," Michigan began. America knew that his father had brainwashed his son into hating and disowning him, but being called America hit him with a painful lance that thickened the lump in his throat.

He really was going to cry.

"Hi, Michigan," America began, his own voice thick with emotion and grief, "It's so good to see you again."

Michigan looked somewhat uncomfortable, and America began trying to reel his emotions in, not wanting to scare off his son after so long.

"Sorry if...sorry if I'm a bit emotional or a bit much. It's...it's been a long time. I've missed you so much," America said.

"Maybe tell him you aren't going to pressure him to call you dad. I know you want it, Ame, but it's not going to happen for a while. Let him know you'll wait for him to be ready," Charlotte added. America bit down a bitter laugh.

He had been waiting for his son for almost two hundred years. He didn't want to wait any longer. But Charlotte was right.

"You also...you don't have to call me...call me dad, right away. It's...it's good enough to see you again," America added and watched

as some of the nervousness drained from his son's body, sending another bolt of pain through him.

"Thank you," Michigan said, his voice nearly a whisper, before he cleared his throat, speaking louder, "I don't know what you want to do or talk about. I..."

Realizing that Michigan had trailed off, America quickly stepped in.

"I just want to get to know you again. I...there's a nice family restaurant down the road if you want to go there and eat, and just tell me about your life and your interests and all that. I know...I know painfully little about you. You can control the topics. I just...I just want to be in your life again," America said before swallowing thickly. The words had been hard to say around the lump in his throat, around the storm of emotions running through him.

Michigan smiled, and America was struck by how familiar that smile was—so reminiscent of Indiana and Illinois that it hurt.

A dark part of America wondered if Michigan was ever hurt for those superficial similarities. America shut that part of him down. He would cry about his failures after the fact.

"That sounds nice. But I...I am allowed to leave if I get uncomfortable?" Michigan asked. The pain in America's heart grew. His son should never have to feel uncomfortable around him. He should feel safe.

America nodded, "Of course you can. I don't want to mess things up further. Let me, *please,* let me know if I have crossed a line. I know you aren't the son I lost, but it's easier to tell my head that than my heart that."

"Thank you," Michigan said. There was something so painfully formal about the way he was acting, like he was meeting an ally, not a long-lost family member. America wondered if his children who had written to Michigan over the past fifty-something years had dealt with a similar phenomenon.

He wondered how long it took for them to get through Michigan's

walls. Because as much as America understood why, and he could understand, he had lived under Britain for two hundred-odd years too, he wanted to know the man his son had become.

He wanted to know who Michigan was now. He knew Michigan's birthday had been changed to the day Hull surrendered, and he wondered if Michigan remembered his actual birthday. He wondered if Michigan wanted to know.

"Vermont says Canada is a good father, but uh...that's true, right? He's good to you? He doesn't hurt you?" America asked. He knew how Britain's parenting tactics were, and although Vermont visited the Canadian side of his family often, he was still an outsider, not privy to all details.

"It's still a terrible first question," James said, sounding annoyed.

"I don't know. I think it shows that America still thinks about his well-being and cares about him," Amelia said.

Michigan looked horrified at the prospect.

"No! Father—" And boy, if that didn't sting. "—is the best. He treats me and my brothers well! He would never hurt us! Are you trying to make me doubt him?"

Michigan was instantly on the defensive, assuming the worst. It stung worse than him calling Canada father.

"No, no! I just want to make sure you're safe and loved. I know...I know how Britain is," America protested, concern and fear flooding through him as Michigan flinched slightly at Britain's name. "I just...I want you to be happy. I accepted long ago that you would never again be part of my nation. I've come to accept that. But to me, you still never stopped being my son. No matter how much you hate me, I still love you. I always will. Canada and I have our issues, but as long as he ensures you're safe and happy...then I'll do my best to be as okay as I can with him being your dad. Even if it hurts me, you're more important."

It was more honest than what he was used to, but Vermont had

drilled into his head that honesty was the best thing to come to Michigan with. Vermont said that if he laid everything out for Michigan, Michigan would be more willing to trust him because he knew where America stood.

"Father ensures that my family is as safe as happy as it can be," Michigan said, voice firm as he stared America in the eyes. America nodded.

"Good. That's all I want from him. To know you'll be safe with him," America said.

"And weekly visits!" Amelia protested.

"Later, Lia. Not now. It's not appropriate for that. We need to regain Michigan's trust in us. Michigan calls the shots."

Michigan let out a small laugh, and America smiled.

"This isn't what I expected," he said, "You're more okay with everything."

"I've had a lot of time to think. And...because I love you, I have to be willing to let you call the shots." America said. Michigan smiled.

"That means a lot. Now, I'm hungry, so if it's okay, can we go to that restaurant you talked about," he asked. America nodded.

"'Course we can."

Maybe things weren't perfect now, but they were better than they had been.

America got to talk to Michigan again. Very little could be better than that.